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Case Studies from  
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**Living Arrangements and Support Relationships  
among Elderly Indonesians:  
Case Studies from Java and Sumatra**

by  
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## ABSTRACT

Most elderly parents in Indonesia coreside with their adult children. However, preliminary studies provide some evidence that casts doubt on the presumed relationship between coresidence and receipt of support (Frankenberg et al. 1999; Cameron 2000). This paper uses qualitative case studies of elderly parents and their adult children to examine the connection between living arrangements and support relationships.<sup>1</sup> We collected the data for the case studies through the use of in-depth interviews, direct observation, and a structured household questionnaire. We conducted the case studies in urban and rural areas on Java and Sumatra, respectively, and we focused upon two distinct sociocultural groups: the Javanese and the Batak Karo. The use of different geographic locations allowed us to evaluate how the urban and rural environment, as well as traditional sociocultural norms, shaped the preferences and behaviors of elderly parents and their adult children. This paper argues for the conceptual separation of living arrangements and support relationships, and it suggests the existence of a support continuum that has six distinct levels, ranging from level 1 (elderly parents completely supporting adult child) to level 5 (adult child completely supports elderly parents), with level 6 indicating no exchange of support whatsoever. Primarily, “support” refers to transfers of time and money; however, the case study approach facilitates the evaluation of less quantifiable aspects of support, including companionship, knowledge, and experience. Based on evidence from the case studies, it appears that some elderly parents completely support their adult children; however, in most cases the relationship between parent and child is reciprocal. Because these relationships are often subtle, they are easily missed when researchers rely on highly structured methods of data collection. This study of the support continuum in Indonesia will be of use to anyone seeking to understand the complex and nuanced relationships that exist between the elderly and their children. The case studies, besides providing a window through which to observe the Indonesian household, also provide insights that will be useful to those who wish to design structured survey instruments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has the third largest elderly population (65 and older) in the developing world, and this percentage is expected to increase (Adlakha and Rudolph, 1994). Furthermore, Indonesia is continuing to urbanize, and, increasingly, the growing elderly population will reside in urban areas. According to a United Nations Human Development Report (1999), the elderly made up 4.5 percent of the population in 1997, and they are expected to make up approximately 6.3 percent of the population in 2015. Simultaneously, the percentage of the general population residing in urban areas is expected to increase from approximately 37 percent in 1997 to approximately 52 percent in 2015. While the majority of the elderly reside with their adult children, theorists believe that, as developing countries continue to modernize, the pattern of adult children providing support for their elderly parents will diminish (Caldwell, 1996; Cameron, 2000). It is interesting to note that, throughout Asia, patterns of coresidence show only a modest decline (Hermalin, 1997; Knodel and Debavalya, 1997). However, relatively little is known about the preferences and expectations of elderly parents and adult children in Indonesia.

Preliminary studies of living arrangements in Indonesia indicate that coresidence has diminished only slightly in recent years (Frankenberg et al., 1999). An interesting finding is that elderly parents are more likely to coreside with their adult children before the age of 70 than they are after the age of 70; indeed, transitions from single residence to coresidence are relatively rare. This does not support the common assumption that the likelihood of coresidence increases as elderly parents enter the later stages of the lifecycle and become less self-sufficient. The Indonesian Family Life Survey, analyzing the same data, found that the parents of children with high incomes were more likely to live by themselves than were the parents of children with low incomes (Cameron, 2000). These findings, albeit quantitatively small, call into question the nature of the relationship between coresidence and receipt of care, and they lead us to hypothesize that elderly parents below the age of 70 are providing their adult children with care for an extended period of time before the latter leave home and start their own households. If this hypothesis is accurate, then it would

seem that the elderly are finding themselves on their own precisely when they are entering the most vulnerable stage of the lifecycle. This, in turn, points to the need for institutionalized support networks.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze living arrangements and support in two distinct geographic settings in Indonesia. The analysis is based on a series of qualitative case studies conducted in urban and rural areas in the Special Province of Yogyakarta and the Province of North Sumatra. We conducted in-depth interviews from the perspective of elderly parents and from the perspective of an adult child (or, if an adult child was unavailable, from an alternate potential caregiver). We documented each case study through the use of direct observation and a structured household questionnaire. We found that these living and support relationships are highly nuanced and that elderly parents and their children engage in a complex set of reciprocal relationships. It is only in a very limited number of cases that support arrangements between elderly parents and their children are unidirectional. Through examining detailed case studies, we analyze the context-specific circumstances that shape decisions regarding living arrangements and support. We then go on to conceptualize, in the form of a support continuum, the diverse relationships that emerge from these arrangements. This continuum ranges from elderly parents functioning as sole providers to adult children functioning as sole providers. We also show that traditional sociocultural values continue to play an important role in shaping the preferences and expectations of elderly parents and adult children in Indonesia.

## QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

This study sought to gain a more in-depth understanding of a number of issues related to living arrangements and care of the elderly in Indonesia. The specific questions addressed in the case studies are:

- What is the relationship between coresidence and receipt of care?
- What are the expectations of elderly parents and adult children?

- How are traditional sociocultural values regarding relations between elderly parents and adult children changing as a result of urbanization and modernization?

## SOCIOCULTURAL SETTING

Indonesia is comprised of hundreds of distinct sociocultural groups, each of which has unique traditional laws (*adat*), local languages, and patterns of kinship. As Indonesia continues to urbanize and modernize, two questions emerge: (1) To what extent will these traditional household structures and values remain intact? and (2) How will changes affect the support relationships between elderly parents and their adult children? The case studies analyzed in this paper are drawn from two distinct groups: the Javanese in Yogyakarta and the Batak Karo in North Sumatra. These two sociocultural groups have been studied extensively by ethnographers, anthropologists, and sociologists.

The defining element of Javanese culture is the attention given to social hierarchy (Koentjaraningrat, 1967). Despite this, the *somah*, or household, remains the most basic unit in Javanese society. It is common for separate, yet related, households to reside under one roof. In these cases a separate kitchen usually represents an independent household. Koentjaraningrat explains that, in Javanese society, there are no fixed rules governing where a married couple should live. Eventually, a married couple will establish their own independent household, but this usually occurs several years after marriage. Often a newly married couple will build their house adjacent to the wife's parents' house, and the two houses will share the same roof but have separate kitchens. These observations were made in the early 1960s, and they were based on fieldwork conducted in rural villages in Central Java. Koentjaraningrat describes the traditional Javanese patterns of elderly parents coresiding with their adult children:

Most Javanese desire a large family, because of the practical considerations that children can take care of their older parents ... Old couples with married daughters or sons who reside matrilocally or patrilocally for the initial period of marriage may form temporary as well as permanent matrilocal, patrilocal, or ambilocal extended families. (Koentjaraningrat, 1967: 260)

We hypothesize that, as Indonesia urbanizes and modernizes, the aforementioned practices will change and the Javanese will move towards more nucleated family structures. Koentjaraningrat's ethnographic observations document traditional norms and expectations regarding coresidence and social relations between elderly parents and their adult children, and they provide a starting point for evaluating our hypothesis.

In Karo culture, kinship is central to all social interactions and relationships. The Karo kinship system has been described in detail by Singarimbun (1975) and Needham (1978). Singarimbun describes the traditional the household, the relationship between adult children and their parents, and the independent nature of the elderly:

The smallest but also the most significant economic unit in Karo society is the *djabu*, or nuclear family, which forms a unit for the consumption and production of food ... Although the *djabu* is established through the marriage bond, a newly married couple does not immediately become a *djabu* in the real sense of the word. A newly wed couple usually continues to live with parents for about a year; ideally, they should initially reside with the *djabu* of the husband's parents. During this time they depend entirely upon their parents, but as soon as they can afford to, usually after the first harvest, they establish their own *djabu* ... It is worth noting that, among the Karo, parents are inclined to be independent in their old age and do not rely on their married children. (Singarimbun, 1967: 121)

It is interesting to note that there is a connection between recently married children establishing an independent household and their ability to form an independent economic unit. Singarimbun also explains that the process of recently married children establishing their own *djabu* is so important to Batak Karo culture that it is marked with a ceremony. When Singarimbun interviewed elderly parents who were residing with their children and

unable to maintain a *djabu* of their own, they consistently stated that they would have preferred to remain an independent household but had to coreside as a result of ill health. Because these observations were made in the 1960s, they depict the traditional living arrangements of elderly parents and adult children and, thus, provide a starting point for analyzing our two case studies.

## DATA

We decided to approach our research questions by employing a case studies strategy. Yin (1994) describes the case study as a form of empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” There is some disagreement in the literature regarding whether a case study is a methodology or, alternatively, a decision regarding what object to study (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994). It is our view that the case study is a research strategy and that, as such, it must speak to both of these issues. It is well documented in the methodological literature that the case study is appropriate to descriptive and exploratory studies (Yin 1994). However, at the same time, the case study must investigate a “bound social system” such as an individual, household, or community. The unit of analysis in this study is an elderly individual or couple and their relationship with their adult child. Given the exploratory nature of the research questions and the contextual elements involved, the case study was the most appropriate research strategy. Some examples of important contextual elements are: cultural expectations, family cohesion, economic conditions, position in the lifecycle, and marital obligations. In our investigation of living arrangements and support for the elderly, such elements were particularly relevant.<sup>2</sup>

The data are based on 20 case studies involving elderly respondents and their adult children. If an adult child was unavailable, then the respondent was asked to identify an

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<sup>2</sup> Knodel and Saengtienchai (1999) used a similar strategy in their study of the living arrangements of the elderly in Thailand.



alternate potential “caregiver.”<sup>3</sup> Each elderly individual (and their spouse) and their adult child represent a single case study. We collected the data in urban and rural areas in two regions: the Special Province of Yogyakarta, where we conducted 10 case studies involving Javanese respondents (five urban and five rural) and the Province of North Sumatra, where we conducted 10 case studies involving Batak Karo respondents (five urban and five rural). In all of the case studies the main respondent was an elderly individual; that is, someone 60 years of age or older. In addition to interviewing an elderly individual, we also interviewed her/his adult child. In total we interviewed 20 elderly respondents and 20 adult children (or alternate respondents). The following table lists the living arrangements of the elderly respondents represented in the case studies:

Table 1. Living Arrangements of Elderly Respondents

Living Arrangements	Special Province of Yogyakarta	North Sumatra
All alone	-	1
Couple alone	3	2
With ever-married adult children	3	1
With never-married adult child	3	6
With a grandchild only	1	-
With an adult child and grandchild	5	4
Total N	10	10

The majority of respondents lived with either an ever-married or never-married adult child. An adult child was defined as a person over 18 years of age. Approximately half the respondents lived in multigenerational households, usually with an adult child and grandchildren. In almost all cases the adult child identified by the elderly respondent either coresided with the elderly parent or lived close by.

<sup>3</sup> The primary respondent was the elderly parent; the secondary respondent was an adult child who lived in the household. If an adult child did not live in the household, then the respondent identified an alternate respondent. This person was either someone who functioned as a caretaker or someone whom the respondent felt she could turn to for help should the need arise. The alternate respondent was not necessarily a non-resident child: the primary respondent was free to identify anyone as an alternate respondent.

The criteria for respondent selection were age, parental status, residence (urban versus rural), and ethnicity. Most elderly respondents lived with an adult child or in close proximity to one. We used key informants to identify respondents in the various study areas, and we made some effort to select case studies that represented diverse living arrangements.<sup>4</sup> The elderly respondent identified the adult child (or an alternate respondent) based on a series of questions that asked her to identify the individual who helped her the most. If the respondent did not receive help on a regular basis, he was asked to identify an individual that he would call on for help should he suddenly become ill. In the context of this study, the alternate respondent was someone who provided varying degrees of “care,” ranging from intensive daily care to potential incidental help.

We used three methods to collect our data: direct observation; a structured questionnaire; and a semi-structured, in-depth interview. In order to collect data on household structure, migration history, employment, income, expenditures, and assets, we completed a structured household questionnaire. We also asked them about resident and non-resident children and any transfers that were given to and/or received from these children. With regard to non-resident children, we asked respondents to provide us with basic demographic information, location of residence, frequency of interaction, and economic transfers given and received.

We then administered a semi-structured, in-depth interview to each elderly respondent. We used these interviews, which consisted of a list of open-ended questions organized around different topics (e.g., activities of daily living, oral history, living arrangements and transfers, community interaction, self-reported health status, health history, and effects of the economic crisis<sup>5</sup>), as a discussion guide. To the adult children we administered an abbreviated semi-structured, in-depth interview, the topics of which related primarily to living arrangements, support, and the effects of the economic crisis. We slightly modified these questions for adult children and alternate respondents. Finally, we

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<sup>4</sup> Although we made some effort to select different living arrangements, we did not pre-select the various relationships between elderly parents and adult children that shaped support relationships.

recorded and transcribed all our interviews.

We took the data that we derived from our case studies and analyzed them in order to gain insights into the living arrangements and support patterns of adult children and their elderly parents. This paper is the result of our efforts.

## STUDY LOCATION

We conducted this study in two distinct geographic locations so that we could assess the sociocultural impact of tradition on preference for living arrangements and systems of support. On Java respondents were Javanese, and in North Sumatra they were Batak Karo. The map below illustrates both Indonesia's position within Southeast Asia and the location of the two study areas.

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<sup>5</sup> The economic crisis refers to the Asian economic crisis, which began in 1997. In Indonesia this crisis first manifested itself in terms of the economy; however, it quickly spread to the social, cultural, and political spheres.

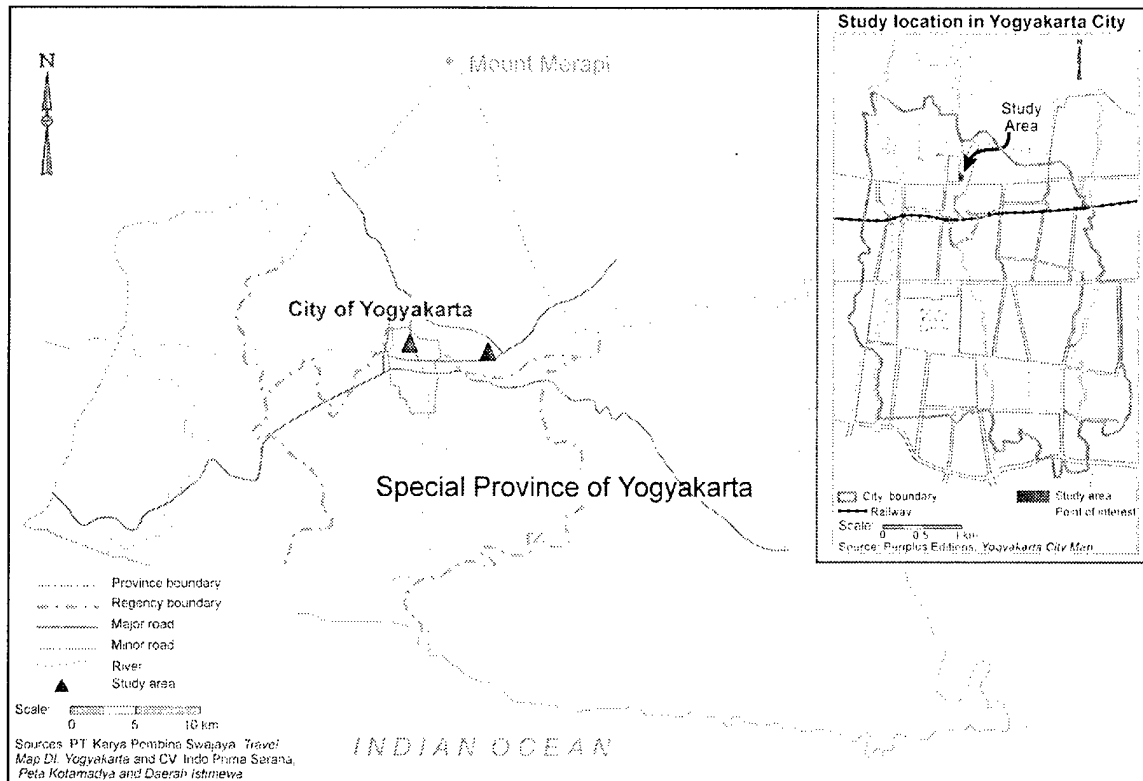
Figure 1. Study Areas in Indonesia<sup>6</sup>



We conducted the Javanese case studies in the Special Province of Yogyakarta, where we focused on an urban community in the city of Yogyakarta and on a rural village located just outside the city.

<sup>6</sup> The authors are thankful to Catherine Griffiths for her work on the maps.

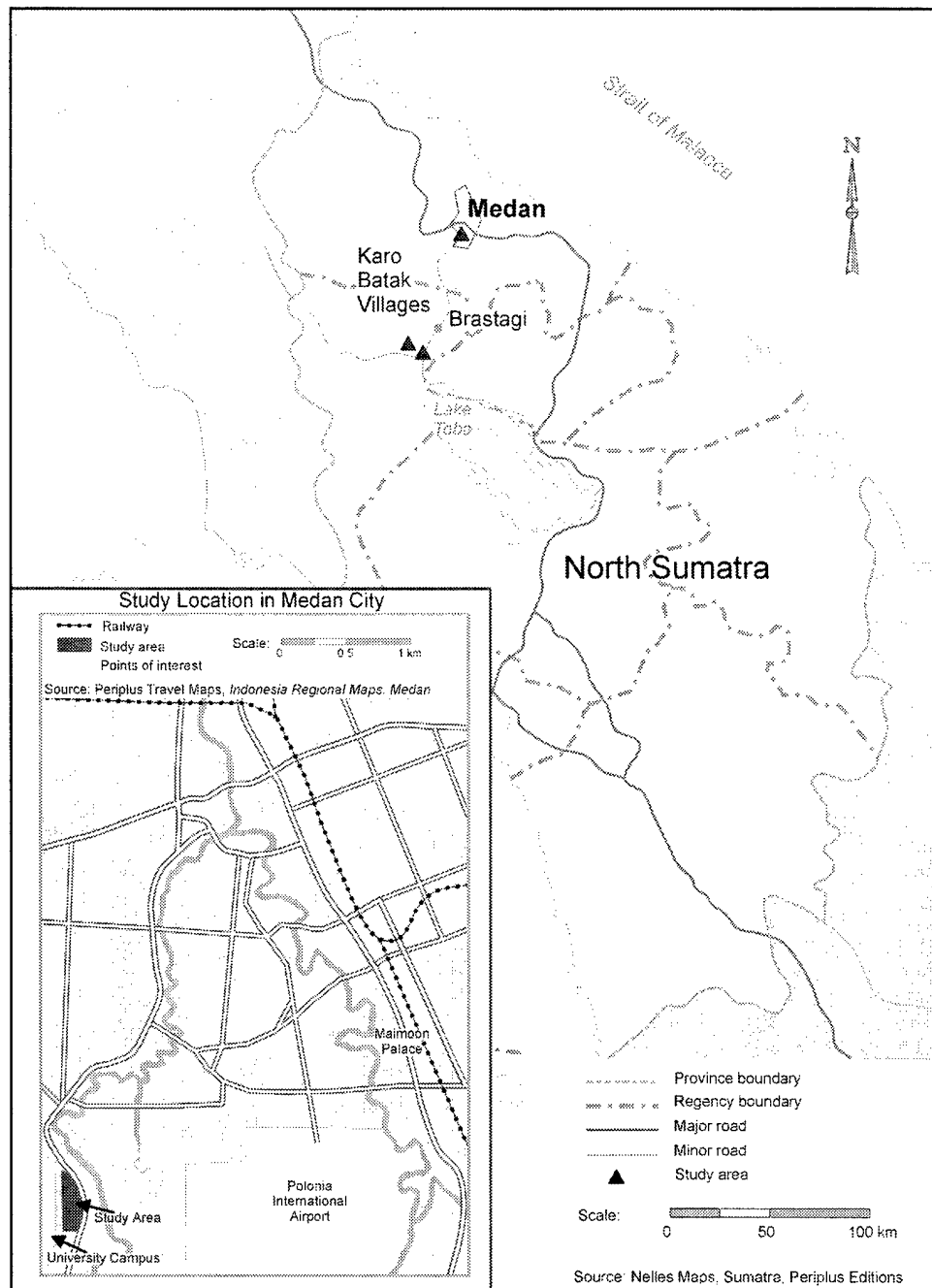
Figure 2. Study Areas in the Special Province of Yogyakarta



In the urban area, we conducted case studies in an informal settlement (*kampung*) in downtown Yogyakarta. This study area has many of the characteristics of a typical informal Indonesian settlement (e.g., dense housing, absence of formal land tenure status, and high levels of employment in the informal sector of the economy). We conducted the case studies of rural respondents in a village located approximately 15 kilometers east of the city. The residents of this village engage in agriculture as well as a variety of alternative income-earning activities.

We conducted the Sumatran case studies in the Province of North Sumatra, which lies between the provinces of Aceh to the north, West Sumatra to the west, and Riau to the south. The Batak people occupy the largest part of the province, while the Karo people occupy the area north of Lake Toba.

Figure 3. Study Areas in North Sumatra



As we did in the Special Province of Yogyakarta, in North Sumatra we conducted our case studies in both urban and rural areas. Urban respondents were from the city of Medan as well as an informal settlement, while rural respondents were from two villages, one of which is a political-administrative center, the other of which is smaller and more isolated.

## FINDINGS

We divide our findings according to: (1) living arrangements and (2) support relationships.

### **Living Arrangements**

Our case study data support conceptually separating living arrangements and support relationships. They also support conceptualizing residence in terms of a continuum. Knodel and Saengtienchai (1999) describe a continuum of coresidence in their “quasi-qualitative” work in Thailand, and they classify coresidence according to five separate categories: disengaged, part-time, daytime, daytime partial, and nighttime. From our case studies, we gleaned the following categories of coresidence:

*Live alone or only with a spouse:* this refers to cases in which respondents live alone or with their spouses and do not reside in close proximity to their children or other kin.

*Coresidence with a child:* this refers to cases in which an elderly person resides with an adult child in the same dwelling.

*Coresidence in multigenerational households:* this refers to cases in which coresidence occurs either day and night or only at night, and it can include coresidence with a child, grandchild, or great-grandchild.

*Quasi-coresidence:* this refers to cases in which elderly parents live alone but in close proximity to their children or other kin.

While these categories are simpler than those suggested by Knodel and Saengtienchai, we are able to plot the more complex elements of the relationships in question along a support continuum.

## Support Relationships

When we use the term “support” we are primarily referring to transfers of time and money; however, in some cases we are referring to less quantifiable aspects of support, such as companionship and contributions derived from knowledge and experience. Our data has enabled us to develop a continuum of support, along which we can plot six different types of relationships between parents and their adult children.

*Elderly parent supports adult child:* this refers to cases in which there is a unidirectional transfer from elderly parent to adult child.

*Elderly parent provides primary support and adult child provides some reciprocal support:* this refers to cases in which the majority of the transfer is from elderly parent to adult child; however, the child does contribute a minor amount of support to the elderly parent.

*Mutually beneficial relationship:* this refers to cases in which transfers are moving relatively equal in both directions, from the elderly parents to the adult child and vice versa.

*Adult child provides primary support and elderly parent provides some reciprocal support:* this refers to cases in which the predominant transfer is from the child to the parents; however, some minor transfers flow from the parents to the child.

*Adult child supports elderly parents* this refers to cases in which the transfer is unidirectional -- from adult child to elderly parents.

*No exchange of support between elderly parents and adult children:* This refers to cases in which there is a complete absence of exchange between elderly parents and adult children.

It is important to note that this continuum refers to the relationship between either one elderly parent or couple and one adult child: it does not include measurement of transfers received by other children or kin. The following table presents this continuum in light of our findings.



Table 2. Support Relationships between Elderly Parents and Their Adult Children

Support Relationship	Special Province of Yogyakarta	North Sumatra	Total
Elderly parent supports adult child	2	1	3
Elderly parent provides primary support and child provides some reciprocal support	3	1	4
Mutually beneficial	4	6	10
Adult child provides primary support, but parent provides some support	1	1	2
Child provides support	-	-	-
No exchange of support	-	1	1
Total N	10	10	20

According to Table 2, the most common relationship between elderly parents and their adult children is a reciprocal one: it is mutually beneficial to both parties. Table 2 also demonstrates the relative independence of elderly parents. There were only two cases in which the adult child was the primary provider for the elderly parent. In the next section, we illustrate each type of relationship with a case study.

#### *Elderly Parent Supports Adult Child*

Situations in which elderly parents supported an adult child were common when the latter resided in the former's home. This generally occurred when the adult child had not yet married, had not started working, and/or had never left home to establish an independent household. However, it also occurred when an adult child was married but had not yet moved away and established an independent household. And in some cases an adult child had moved away, established her own household, and then returned to her parents' home (often due to economic hardship). In what follows we offer two separate case studies of elderly parents who are the primary providers for their adult children.

*Case Study #1: Bapak Johan coresides with his daughter Paulina in a rural village in North Sumatra<sup>7</sup>*

Bapak Johan is 66 years old and lives in a rural village in North Sumatra with his wife, who is 60 years old, and their youngest daughter, Paulina, who is 19 years old and has only recently graduated from high school. Bapak Johan lives in a semi-rural area. He farms a small plot of land (half a hectare) in order to subsidize the pension he receives from his civil service career. Compared to many rural residents in North Sumatra, he is well off. His house is a permanent structure with cement walls, he owns a television and a telephone, and he purchases his water from the water department. Bapak Johan is an elderly parent who coresides with an adult child whom he completely supports. This relationship is understandable, given that Paulina only recently graduated from high school, and this pattern of support is expected to continue for some time. Paulina is planning to attend school in Medan in the next year, and Bapak Johan and his non-resident adult children will send her money to cover her expenses.

Bapak Johan and his wife have five non-resident children who have their own independent households, although only two of these children are married. His non-resident children range in age from 40 years old to 28 years old. According to Bapak Johan, he has an equally close relationship with all his children. When asked if he receives any support from his non-resident children, he replied that he receives support from all of them and that he, in turn, supports them. Some of his children send him money on an incidental basis, others bring him food when they visit. Whenever any of his children visit, he gives them food from his farm. Three of his adult children live in Medan, thus illustrating the rural-to-urban transition that is presently under way in Indonesia.

When we asked Bapak Johan from whom he would seek help if he and/or his wife were to become ill, he said that if there was not sufficient time to contact his children who live outside the area, then he would turn to a neighbor. This shows that he does not view his daughter Paulina as a provider of support or, indeed, even as an adult. Paulina believes

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<sup>7</sup> All names are aliases.

that she contributes to her father's household in subtle ways. She said, for example, that her older siblings ask her to provide them with updates of her parents' health status. The case of Bapak Johan demonstrates that coresidence does not necessarily mean that the elderly parent is receiving support from his adult child. Bapak Johan is Paulina's primary provider, and the support relationship is almost completely unidirectional. However, even in this relatively straightforward case of an elderly respondent supporting his adult child, his non-resident children were providing him with small amounts of support on an irregular basis.

*Case Study #2: Bapak Bintoro coresides with his daughter Ibu Maryati in an urban neighborhood in Yogyakarta*

Bapak Bintoro is 63 years old and lives in the city of Yogyakarta with his wife, his daughter, his son-in-law, and his two grandchildren. Bapak Bintoro works at three different jobs and is the primary provider for all the members of his household. He is a security guard at the post office in the morning, he is a seller of used bicycles at midday, and he is a parking attendant at night. Bapak Bintoro lives in an informal squatter settlement near downtown Yogyakarta. He has lived in this community all his life, and it is here that he raised his children.

Bapak Bintoro has three other children besides the one with whom he coresides. Of his non-resident children, one lives in the same community in a separate house and another lives in a city in West Java. When asked if his non-resident children provide him with support, he replied: "We have four children. I think it is too difficult for them to help us. We do not have any expectations -- only if they come home that they might bring us a souvenir, whether that is clothes, or whatever." He went on to explain that he has been poor all his life and that his children find it very difficult to survive in the urban areas where they now reside. He referred to himself and his children as "have nots." Knowing that they are poor, Bapak Bintoro does not expect his children to have extra resources to send him. When asked about where he plans to live when he is too old to work and to live alone, he

replied that he did not have any plans and that he hoped that he would be able to continue to work for a long time.

Bapak Bintoro's economic transfers to his adult daughter and her family are solely unidirectional. His daughter, Ibu Maryati, and her husband are unemployed, although the latter had a job before the onset of the economic crisis. When interviewed she discussed her desire to have her own house and to live independently from her father and mother, although she acknowledged that it would take some time before she could accomplish this -- especially given the current economic crisis. As the primary income earner, Bapak Bintoro also pays for his grandchildren's school expenses.

Unlike Bapak Johan, Bapak Bintoro supports his adult daughter, her husband, and two children because they have been unable to establish an economically self-sufficient household. These two case studies demonstrate the kind of diverse circumstances within which an elderly parent will continue to support an adult child. In some cases, elderly parents have large families, and they reach the age of 60 before their youngest children finish high school and leave home; in others, adult children leave home only to return when they begin to experience economic difficulties.

#### *Elderly Parent Provides Primary Support and Adult Child Provides Some Reciprocal Support*

This type of relationship occurred when the adult child was living in the elderly parent's home. Again, this support arrangement occurred between elderly parents and (1) unmarried and married children, (2) children who had never left home, and (3) children who had left home for a period of time and then returned. Often the elderly parent would provide the adult child with housing, and the latter would work and contribute to the household economy or perform chores for the former.

*Case Study #1: Ibu Meriah coresides with her daughter Rimbun in an urban neighborhood in Medan*

Ibu Meriah is a 65-year-old widow who coresides with her two unmarried daughters in Medan. She lives in a permanent house in a middle-income neighborhood. Ibu Meriah does not work outside the home; however, she does manage a small informal shop that she runs out of the front of her house, and she rents rooms in her house to university students. She receives her own pension as well as her late husband's pension, and she controls the income she earns from the rooms she rents to students.

Ibu Meriah has seven children, five of whom are married and do not coreside with her. Of these five married children, three live within three kilometers of her home. Her children range in age from 28 to 41 years old. Ibu Meriah's oldest child lives 150 kilometers away, and he makes payments on her newly constructed house. Ibu Meriah resides with her two unmarried daughters, the oldest of whom is 31 and the youngest of whom is 28. These two daughters do not have outside employment, and, even though they perform most of the household chores and work as cashiers in the family shop, in our survey Ibu Meriah referred to them as "unemployed." She shops for them and gives them an allowance.

Ibu Meriah's relationship with her children is complicated. Support flows from Ibu Meriah to her children in the form of housing and money, and it flows from them to her the form of help with the store and household chores. Ibu Meriah also receives regular support from a number of her non-resident children. According to Ibu Meriah, there is no relationship between the age and sex of her children and her expectations regarding receipt of support. When asked to whom she would turn for help, she replied that she would turn to the child who lives closest to her or to whichever child was available.

According to Ibu Meriah, it is appropriate that she still coreside with her daughters, as they are unmarried; when they are married they will leave her house and start their own households. Consistent with the ethnographic data on the Batak Karo, our study of Ibu Meriah confirms that, ideally, an elderly parent should not expect support from her

children. Ibu Meriah feels that she will not need help from her children because she has both her own pension and her husband's pension. When all her children have married and moved away and she is too old to take care of herself, she hopes to enter an old-age home. She imagines that this will be a pleasant experience because such homes are organized according to religious beliefs, and, when she enters one, she expects to receive religious instruction. Her knowledge of old-age homes is based on her work as a volunteer at a local home.

### *Mutually Beneficial*

Coresidence with adult children is the most common form of living arrangement among the elderly in Indonesia. Our study found that a mutually beneficial relationship is the most prevalent support arrangement among elderly parents and coresident adult children. However, these arrangements are nuanced and, thus, may be easily overlooked in a highly structured survey. The two case studies below illustrate the subtle yet complex nature of such relationships.

#### *Case Study #1: Bapak Slamet coresides in a multigenerational household in an urban neighborhood in Yogyakarta*

Bapak Slamet is a 73-year-old widower who lives in a permanent house in a low-income neighborhood in the City of Yogyakarta. His house is located on the main street into the community, and it is split in two: one half is Bapak Slamet's living quarters, and the other half is his daughter's hair salon. His daughter, Ibu Harsiwi, and her husband rent a house in the same neighborhood. They have three children, ranging in age from 11 to 21 years old. These children sleep at Bapak Slamet's house. Basically, they coreside with their grandfather at night, but they also spend time at his house during the day, especially when their mother is working at the salon. Bapak Slamet's granddaughter also benefits from the strategic location of his house, as she uses the front step on the main road to sell powdered milk. Because they have no running water in their house, Ibu Harsiwi, her husband, and her children use Bapak Slamet's bathroom. Bapak Slamet and Ibu Harsiwi exemplify a

stereotypical Javanese relationship between an elderly parent and an adult child in that their two households are socially, economically, and even physically (in terms of the use of space) intertwined.

Bapak Slamet has three children who are younger than Ibu Harsiwi. Two of these live in Sumatra, and one lives 100 kilometers from Yogyakarta. These children occasionally send their father money, and he likes to give some of this money to Ibu Harsiwi because she cooks for him and pays his bills. According to Ibu Harsiwi, she does not like to accept money from her father because he has so little spending money. Each day she gives her father money to cover the cost of his cigarettes and newspaper. Bapak Slamet washes his own clothes and cleans his house.

The relationship between Bapak Slamet and Ibu Harsiwi, which is mutually beneficial, exemplifies the most common relationship observed in this study. Bapak Slamet provides Ibu Harsiwi with various forms of support, including a strategic location for her salon and her daughter's milk business, a bathroom for her family, and a place for her children to sleep. Ibu Harsiwi shops and cooks for her father and provides him with daily spending money. This type of relationship was found in both Java and Sumatra.

*Case Study #2: Ibu Rasmi coresides with her daughter Marsaulina in a rural village in North Sumatra*

Ibu Rasmi is a 64-year-old woman who lives with her husband and her unmarried daughter, Marsaulina, who is 33 years old. Ibu Rasmi and her husband are both farmers, and their daughter is a civil servant who works outside the village. When she is not working, Marsaulina also helps her parents with the farming. They live in a remote village where some families still live in traditional (*adat*) houses.

Ibu Rasmi and her husband have five other children, all of whom are married and live outside the parental home. Three of these children are younger than Marsaulina, and Ibu Rasmi was quick to mention that she was embarrassed that her daughter was not yet married. Two of her children send her small amounts of money, and two provide her with

betel (*sirih*). Recently, Ibu Rasmi's oldest son gave the couple a large sum of money to renovate their house, and, according to Ibu Rasmi and her daughter, he also provides the couple with monetary support on a regular basis. Ibu Rasmi and her husband do not provide any of their non-resident adult children with regular support, although they periodically give small amounts of money or other gifts to their grandchildren.

According to Marsaulina, she would prefer to have her own house. She lives with her parents because she has "failed" to find a spouse and start her own household. Marsaulina said that she hoped to some day have her own house and that the fact that she was the only one of her siblings who still coresided with her parents made her uncomfortable. After she explained this, we asked her if she planned on living with her parents when they were older and could no longer take care of themselves. She explained that her siblings would be jealous if she unilaterally decided to live with her parents and that this decision would have to be made in consultation with her family and other relatives. Indeed, when we asked other Karo about what would happen when their parents were too old to live alone, many of them responded that the decision about where their parents would live and who would take care of them would have to be made jointly.

Ibu Rasmi, her husband, and their daughter have a mutually beneficial relationship. Marsaulina shops for her parents with the money she makes as a civil servant (which equals all her parents' agricultural earnings combined). She wakes early each morning and cooks them their meals for the day and does the housework. When she returns from work, she joins them in the field. Marsaulina's parents provide her with housing and a social identity (i.e., they enable her to classify herself as someone who belongs to a family). The latter is no small contribution, for it must be remembered that, in traditional Batak Karo culture, it is considered to be unacceptable for a single unmarried woman to live alone.

#### *Adult Child Provides Primary Support and Elderly Parent Provides Some Reciprocal Support*

In both study locations it was difficult to find cases in which the adult child was the primary source of support for the elderly parent. In the following case study, the elderly



parent is physically weak and unable to care for herself, but she insists on maintaining an independent source of income and contributing to the household economy.

*Case Study #1: Ibu Damairia coresides in a multigenerational household in a rural village in North Sumatra*

Ibu Damairia is a 90-year-old widow who lives in a permanent structure with her son and extended family. The household has a total of 10 members, including Ibu Damairia's grandchildren and great grandchildren. Her son, the household head, is 55 years old, and his mother-in-law is also part of the household. Ibu Damairia does not work outside the household, although she owns and cares for chickens. The household consumes some of her eggs, and she sells the remainder.

Ibu Damairia has three children who live outside the household. Two of these children are in their seventies, and one of them is 50 years old. All of them live within a 30-mile radius of Ibu Damairia, and they occasionally bring her food while she occasionally gives them eggs.

Ibu Damairia lived on her own until three years prior to our interview. She wanted to continue to live alone in her village, but she could no longer work her fields and cook for herself. When it became necessary for her to move, she first coresided living with her youngest child. However, she was not comfortable with this arrangement, and, as a result, she asked to coreside with the child with whom she lives currently. Ibu Damairia started off her interview by stating she is no longer happy and that she wishes she would die. Each morning she gets up and tends to her chickens, then she stays in the house for the rest of the day. She can no longer either wash her own clothes or clean her own room. She is afraid to go beyond the fence that separates the house from the street because she is afraid she might fall and hurt herself. When asked if there are any activities she enjoys, she mentioned that her favorite activity was going out (*jalan-jalan*) and attending parties but that, because of her physical condition, she is confined to the house. The last party she attended was a funeral, and her relatives had to carry her. In Batak Karo society, parties and

funerals are very important forms of social interaction, hence it is not surprising the Ibu Damairia keenly feels her inability to attend them.

Ibu Damairia's relationship with her eldest son exemplifies a relationship in which an elderly person is primarily taken care of by an adult child. Even though she is very old and is unable to perform many of the basic activities of daily living, Ibu Damairia still contributes to the household economy. During the interview family members told us that she gives them some of her egg money so that they can buy food, while some of it she keeps so that she can give small amounts to her grandchildren. (When we asked her if she could still count her money, she replied that she could -- but slowly.) Ibu Damairia also contributes to the house in less quantifiable ways. For example, during our interview household members asked her to sing a traditional Karo song to her great-grandchild -- a song that other family members obviously had not committed to memory. They were clearly proud of her knowledge. Ibu Damairia and her son's elderly mother-in-law, who also resides in the house, keep each other company during the day.

#### *Adult Child Supports Elderly Parent*

Our case studies do not include an example of an adult child completely supporting an elderly parent. The elderly respondents whom we interviewed were usually economically productive members of their households, although the degree of productivity varied. When elderly parents lived separately of their adult children, they were usually no more and no less economically and physically independent than were those elderly parents who coresided with their adult children. Sometimes elderly parents lived alone and received support from their adult children, sometimes they lived alone and did not receive such support; sometimes elderly parents lived in close proximity to their adult children, sometimes they did not.

#### SOCIOCULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

The ethnographic literature indicates that the sociocultural expectations of the two ethnic groups that form the focus of our study are distinctly different. Our findings support

this. This section presents two case studies that typify the sociocultural expectations of Javanese culture and Batak Karo culture, respectively.

To begin with the Javanese, their cultural expectations are that children will take care of their elderly parents. It is not unusual for Javanese adult children either to coreside with their parents or to live in close proximity to them (often, children build a structure next to that of their parents, and both households share the same roof.) Javanese respondents never discussed living in an old-age home or hiring someone to take care of them.

#### *Javanese Case Study: Ibu Wahyuni*

Ibu Wahyuni is a 61-year-old Javanese woman who resides with her husband in a rural village. She and her husband were born and raised in this rural village, but they moved to Jakarta when Ibu Wahyuni was 25 years old. Because of the economic crisis, they have recently returned to the village of their birth. Ibu Wahyuni and her husband could not have children, but, when her sister died, they adopted her two children. At the time of the interview, Ibu Wahyuni's son was 29 years old and her daughter was 26 years old. Both were still unmarried, and they lived in West Java. Ibu Wahyuni talked about how worried she was about having to leave her two adopted children when she returned to her village. The following quote clearly indicates her desire to live within an extended family:

Yes it is more desirable for our family to live in one house. I do not really know [why], my thoughts are more peaceful. When things are like this, I just remember my children and I want to cry ... I do not know [why]. My thoughts are not peaceful if my family is not together. Eating does not taste good unless you are one with your family.

Ibu Wahyuni spoke of how she constantly worried about her children: each time a bus passed the road in front of her house, she would watch and hope that one or both of her children would descend from it. It is quite possible that Ibu Wahyuni's fears regarding her

children have been amplified by the recent economic crisis and civil unrest in Indonesia. However, many Javanese respondents, regardless of whether or not they were affected by the current political situation, evinced similar sentiments.

Batak Karo cultural expectations are quite different from those of the Javanese. Both elderly parents and adult children wanted to live in independent households. Many elderly respondents mentioned that they wanted to remain independent. If they were to become unable to take care of themselves, then they would rather live in an old-age home or hire a professional caretaker than move in with their adult children.

*Batak Karo Case Study: Bapak Frans Ukur*

Ibu Roga is 60 years old and her husband Bapak Frans Ukur is 64 years old. They live alone in the urban community of Medan and rent rooms to students. They made it clear that they did not want either to coreside with their children or to receive support from them as they grew older. The following statement indicates how happy Ibu Roga is to live alone with her husband:

Yes I am much happier now ... Now I do not have anything to remember besides what is good to eat ... I wish I could live a thousand more years like this with my husband.

When asked how she and her husband will survive should they become too old to take care of themselves, she said that they could either live in an old-age home or use their pensions to hire someone to clean and cook for them. She said that she did not want to burden or annoy her children by coresiding with them. Ibu Roga and her husband were particularly strong in their desire to live alone, but this desire was echoed in numerous other interviews with Batak Karo respondents. In fact, our case studies consistently supported the expectations set out in the ethnographic literature.

## CONCLUSION

The elderly population in Indonesia is increasing, and this pattern is expected to continue. According to the literature, coresidence does not necessarily mean that that elderly parents are receiving support from their adult children (Hermalin, 1997; Knodel and Debavalya, 1997; Treas and Chen 2000). In fact, an initial analysis suggests that the reverse might be the case (Frankenberg et al., 1999; Cameron, 2000). In an attempt to further explore the relationship between elderly parents and adult children in Indonesia, this paper analyzes 20 case studies. These entailed 40 in-depth interviews, direct observation, and the administering of a structured household questionnaire. Data were collected in both rural and urban areas of the Special Province of Yogyakarta and the Province of North Sumatra, respectively. We selected these two provinces so that we could compare two distinct ethnic groups: the Javanese in Yogyakarta and the Batak Karo in North Sumatra.

We found that living arrangements and support relationships are highly nuanced and that, when were examined households in great detail, complex reciprocal relationships emerged. In order to avoid confusing living arrangements with receipt of care, we defined them in terms of residence. The more complex exchanges of support that occur between elderly parents and adult children we defined in terms of a support continuum, along which we identified six distinct levels of support arrangements. This continuum can be understood as a scale ranging from level 1 (the elderly parent completely supporting the adult child) to level 5 (the adult child completely supporting the elderly parent), with level 6 referring to the complete absence of exchange between elderly parent and adult child. We illustrated this continuum with empirical cases studies. Based on our evidence, in some cases elderly parents completely supported their adult children, but in most cases there was a reciprocal relationship between elderly parent and adult child.

Our case study data support the ethnographic data, which suggest that elderly Javanese prefer to coreside with their adult children and to live in extended family structures, while elderly Batak Karo prefer to live on their own. Indeed, these preferences were emphasized repeatedly throughout the case studies. Elderly Javanese respondents

talked about coresidence and residing in close proximity to their children, while elderly Batak Karo respondents talked about living separately and, the importance of having their children establish independent households. These findings refute the hypothesis that modernization will lead to the abandonment of traditional Indonesian family structures. This may, of course, occur in the future; however, it was not evident in this study.

Our analysis suggests a number of areas of investigation that should be incorporated into large-scale data collection efforts, the point of which would be to provide insights into the complex and nuanced nature of relationships between elderly parents and adult children. These areas include subtle and informal income earning activities, use of household space, home ownership, chores, sociocultural preferences, and knowledge and experience. For obvious reasons, many of these areas are difficult to quantify -- a fact that demonstrates the utility of combining qualitative and quantitative research in order to gain a fuller and richer understanding of both living and support relationships.



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